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ALLEYS

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WHEN Mr. Veiller gave me the subject of alleys, and I began to think what ought to be said, it seemed to me that one violent word would express all there was to say about them. As I said to him, in our towns an alley is simply a profane interjection in the sentence of the block. On thinking it over, I found there were several things to be said, both for and against. But as I can speak with knowledge only of medium-sized cities, I may do no more than to open up a minor street of intelligence down which you can drive your wagons of discussion.

There is little classification of alleys: they are narrow or they are wide, they are lighted or they are unlighted. Some are cobbled, some are bricked, some are not paved at all. The vital division is, some are clean and some are dirty. To be sure, paving is a great assurance of cleanliness, as a paved alley can be kept clean and dry. But it is a common sight to see well-paved alleys strewn with paper, tin cans and filth, with a black stream of ooze meandering down the middle.

I suppose we agree that alleys are desirable if they are kept clean and well lighted—an ideal condition. There is no doubt of their being needed for block ventilation in large cities, the very place that they are sometimes not to be found. In smaller towns—and I submit that the small town should be taken as our unit of values, and not the great city—in smaller towns block ventilation is given by large yards and spacious lawns in the residence district. In the business section, even in little towns, the lots are covered entirely with buildings. These large lots of the residence section, too, are disappearing, for the flat mania is growing everywhere. But I hope that every resident of a small or medium-sized town will listen to this, because the idea of block ventilation is generally taken not to

apply except to big cities: Block by block, as you ride or walk from the edge of your town to its center, you will find the air grows denser and fouler, till you reach the bad-air district. You come from the business district, hot and tired and head-achy, and sit down on some veranda near the edge of town, and say, "Ah, how delightfully fresh and pure the air is here. What a contrast to down town." Of course it is. Notice, when you walk the other way. In a few blocks you leave the crisp freshness behind you. The air seems denser and closer. There is more dust and smoke and soot. Near the heart of town, heat waves strike the face. Then odors rise from the street. The buildings are taller and closer together. Now you reach the business houses. Odors of leather, dry goods, paints, bananas and oranges, tobacco, fish, gutter odors, alley odors fill the air. It seems to be stale, as in an unventilated room, and you feel that the air here is stagnant. And this old, foul air, laden with bad odors and impure gases, is all the air that clerks and merchants and bankers have to breathe all day long. It is all the air that little babies, living upstairs in hot rooms over the backs of stores, have to breathe, day and night. So there is need of all the avenues of ventilation that we can get, need of alleys to help the streets bring in the currents of fresh air from the country, to blow away the stale odors and poisonous gases, and to blow a fresh, vital breath in at the tenement windows where the little children are cooped upstairs. And there is need that the alleys be clean, so as not to contaminate the air they convey. Besides serving for block ventilation, the alleys serve as exits for waste, ashes, garbage, and the like. We who are used to this service hardly appreciate it until we come to a city where these undesirables go out the front way, and then we have a bewildered feeling that somehow things are "fatally twishted."

But alas, this very use to which we devote alleys dedicates them to waste and offscourings and makes them boulevards of the abandoned. Still, our waste has to go out some way, and the back way is the most convenient. So it happens that the alley problem and the waste problem are almost identical. It is a great problem, that of properly disposing of waste. Until

we solve it we shall not be perfectly civilized. Some of the waste might be avoided if we could learn not to be so profligate of nature's stores, for half our food goes to garbage, and half our fuel goes to cinders, ashes and smoke. But the waste products caused by necessary elimination must always be taken care of, and their disposal is the vital part of the waste problem.

In towns that have alleys, the refuse is deposited near the alleys and carried out through them. The rear premises are therefore harder to keep clean and sightly, and generally the most care is lavished on the front; that shows more results for the same efforts. People put their best foot foremost, forgetting that this leaves the worst foot hindmost, and collecting all their trash and refuse on the rear premises, turn their backs upon them, as upon an unhappy past. And, indeed, considering alleys as they generally are, it is not surprising if we want to get away from them and forget them, and if we "love—man the less and nature more, from these our interviews."

Along our alleys, in stables, or sheds, or bins, or cans, we bestow every form of waste. First, and worst, are the cess-pools or vaults—thousands upon thousands of them. Second are the garbage cans. Next come the ash bins and rubbish piles. The contents of these outside receptacles are gathered up and carted away down the alleys at irregular intervals. So, down the alleys goes the ash cart, with its rumble and creak; and down the alley goes the slop man with his unpleasant "toot, toot," and down the alley goes the wagon of the rag man, "Rags, rags," severally scattering ashes, and noises, and germs. In their wake go the seedy loafers, lounging through the alleys, and stray dogs, and dusty cats, slinking heavily along, with fierce and frowning faces—the ones that nobody loves. But nice people (where I live) don't like to go through the alleys, and they try to keep their children out of them. They don't even talk or think about them. If we were Hindus, we would make our low caste people go through the alleys. If we had lepers, we would make them go through the alleys. This is our popular attitude.

The alley has its revenge on us, as all neglected things will have. Out of the alley issue offensive odors and poisonous

gases, and a plague of flies, to torment us to reason, as they tormented Pharaoh. But we harden our hearts, and cling to all the abominations, even in our good residence districts.

In the crowded and poorer districts, the alleys are the avenues for vice and contagion. We have our own cocaine alley, in behind saloons and fish stores and low dives, where the lowest and vilest congregate, the human waste of the city, in all their filth. Almost every city has its alleys of this kind, that only the police know about, dangerous to pass, dangerous as breeding places of pestilence. Here crimes are committed, hence issues an inky current of contamination that sometimes reaches to our very doors.

Here, in our slum districts, the boys play in rough gangs—the boys who will be our future politicians and city fathers. Here little girls find a side entrance to the juvenile court or reformatory. Here babies crawl over the filthy paving and no one sees how many little graves open up just at the end of the alley. We don't see them, because we avert our faces when we pass by, to escape the odors of beer and tobacco, and the other worse things. In the death list infant mortality is not commented on, nor divided off to itself. It all goes together, in little plain type, and most people don't have time to read it, after they have read the sensations and markets and dramatic and sporting and society news. If it could be put in glaring type it might help to reform the alleys.

It does not take long to sum up the evils of the bad types of alleys. They are as brief as "the short and simple annals of the poor." But, like the old singer, "My tale is not long, but it's strong." Lack of light, lack of drainage of surrounding premises, the scattering of filth and trash from adjacent premises and from passing wagons, leave many alleys dismal, damp and dirty. In the worst specimens we find trash, paper, tin cans, cartons, rags, old shoes, stable refuse, ashes, mud, pools of dishwater and so on—I can say no more.

Mr. Veiller, in *Housing and Health*, insists that "the alley, if it is to remain, must be treated as a street. It must be paved; it must be cleaned at regular intervals, that is, kept clean, not made clean; it must be lighted and it must be policed."

He shows how the increase of the city's expenses will be compensated in reduced cost of police courts and jails, hospitals and relief, saying: "It is better economy to keep people well than to get them well, to prevent crime than to punish it." He goes on to point out the need for the city to dispose of all refuse, and not leave it to the citizens, who are too often unable to pay to have it carted away. He says: "There are few cities in America to-day where the garbage is collected with sufficient frequency or regularity. And the city which collects rubbish, ashes and other waste is yet the exception rather than the rule." He points out that "in every city in the country the health department is terribly undermanned."

Each one of us here knows that this is true. We know, too, that we cannot expect to have our alleys paved, cleaned and lighted so long as miles of streets are unpaved, uncleaned and unlighted. When all the outer streets of a city have neither sewer pipes nor water mains, the alleys have to share their fate. And if the city fathers agree that the city is paving and cleaning and piping as fast as its finances will permit, what can be done?

In some places a time limit is set regularly for a "clean up." A policeman calls at each door and leaves the order for the alleys to be cleaned. Then the citizen must either hire his share of the alley cleaned or get out with a broom and shovel and do it himself. The result is better than you might look for. But even though the city should undertake to clean, pave and light the alleys, as well as the streets, the citizens will need to see that it is done, and a private committee of citizens to look after every department of civic work is a great safeguard and help.

It is only when all of our citizens realize that "we can have freedom from preventable diseases in proportion as we are willing to pay for it," and choose rightly between "dollars or deaths," that we can expect to have the money that is needed spent on health departments. I believe that we shall agree that vaults are vital to the alley problem, as they are generally situated on the rear premises, and do more than anything else to pollute the air of the alleys. In fact, the rear tenements, on the alleys, have little air supply which is not contaminated by the

odors from the vaults, and the flies which breed there are the worst menace of the rear tenant. So the removal of the vault is the most important as well as the most difficult part of the alley problem. It is going to require tremendous pressure to force our people to remove the vaults and to instal the necessary plumbing in every house. Cost, inconvenience of installing, custom, prejudice, selfishness, indifference, will all have to be taken into account. Those who have had any experience in getting reforms know just what a long, hard battle will be required.

There will have to be a nation-wide publicity campaign. Such work as Dr. George Thomas Palmer has done in Springfield, Illinois, in making a complete sanitary map of the city will help a great deal. His work will help us and make it easier for us to get sanitary maps. And I am sure that in this, as in every other campaign for the betterment of the race, the press will take the glorious part in the warfare that it has always taken. I am glad to know that the wisest men in our country are already laying plans for this campaign, and that all that we have to do is just to fall in line and lend our help.

Looking about for other things that contribute to the alley filth along the rear of the lot, we find the ash bins. These will disappear when we all use gas or electricity. Until then we must put up with the soot and cinders, for we have not yet found the coal that consumes perfectly, advertisements to the contrary. Invention may find a way to transmute ashes into some article of commerce, but let's not count on it.

The garbage question is another puzzler. In a certain northern city the poorer tenants dig holes in the back yard and bury the garbage. In some places, many people burn their garbage, as horrid smells of burning bones and greens inform us. But, when we use gas or electricity, we shall have no place to burn our garbage. In the country one can give to a pig or cow, but these tenement laws "prohibit swine, goats, *etc.*" Clearly, we shall have to come to the use of only tabloid foods, or liquid foods. But now, the ash bin and the garbage can seem as deeply rooted (pardon the rhetoric) as the frying pan and the coffee pot, that we curse and cling to. And if we must have

them, the prompt and frequent removal of ashes and garbage is of the utmost importance. We all have our troubles in this regard. But what do you think of cities that remove neither ashes nor garbage, or, perhaps, only garbage, and whose citizens are forced to pay to have their ashes hauled away? This results in mountains of cinders, in some back yards of the tenements, growing taller by every contribution of each new tenant. One of our health officers said that people would get up at four o'clock in the morning to dump their ashes on to a vacant lot. That may be understood in the case of people too poor to afford to have their ashes hauled away. But I saw one morning, in a fine residence district, an old lady who lives in an elegant home, slip through an alley and dump two great baskets of papers onto a vacant lot, and hurry away as if in fear of being seen. She had a furnace in her home, and might easily have burned the papers, which the wind soon lifted and bore all over the lot and down the alley. This old lady was only a type of the hundreds and thousands who are responsible for our trash-littered streets and alleys. Until we can train the rising generation not to scatter paper wrappings and cartons, the lovers of neatness will have to suffer. The cure for the trash evil is the real cure for all the other alley nuisances, the universal solvent of all the reformer's difficulties—education. But oh, how slowly it does its work! Still, it is a comforting kind of solution, because it shifts part of the burden off our shoulders onto the younger generation. But we do have to educate, even though we legislate, for the enforcement of laws depends on the education of the citizens.

We shall have to lay bare and make known all the facts about filth and waste and about the disease they produce. I think that if we were to lay bare the alleys themselves, take down the sheds and the high fences that screen them and shut them out of sight, and have them all in plain view, people would be much more tidy and cleanly about the alleys. It's all very nice to plant vines over our ugly sheds, and put trellises before the ash bins, but if we could sprinkle all about every centre of contamination some drug with a horrible odor we might do more towards getting conditions improved. People wouldn't

rest until they removed the source of the smell. Bad odors are like pain, friendly warnings of danger. Until we make the danger spots unbearable, people will continue to bear them. Publicity is fast making the fly unbearable. More publicity will make the vault unbearable. Reformers always begin, or should begin, by exposing the conditions which need reform. History shows that this is the successful way. So it must be our painful task to bombard the eyes and ears and noses of the public, until they yield. A most ungrateful task, you will agree. A person who insists on dragging unsavory nuisances before the public is put into the class of unsavory nuisances himself. The civic improvers are wisest who spend more time in eradicating nuisances than in planting vines over them. So we must go on with our malodorous task, hoping that in after years, at least, our deeds will "smell sweet," and blossom in the dust. Though this generation stone us, their children will garnish our sepulchers.

The task before us is to change the whole mental attitude of our people. The alley, as it is to-day, is only a visible expression of the public thought about all health problems, carelessness, indifference, or disgust. We have been too successful stoics, and misapplied the teaching of that dear old heathen, Marcus Aurelius: "How easy it is to repeal and to wipe away every impression which is troublesome or unsuitable, and immediately to be in all tranquillity."

A false civic pride has made us hide our city's shame and danger, while real civic pride and interest makes us ferret out and destroy all that hurts or hinders its growth.

There are two ways to educate, one by showing the bad conditions, the other by showing the better way. Our civic improvers need to make the lawns so lovely that the alleys will blush at the contrast. Our good citizens need to set a good example of clean alleys. Our teachers and parents need to fill the minds of the rising generation with beauty of line and form and color, until they will hate the ugly and the vile. And so, in time, our alleys may come to be broad, clean driveways, well lighted, bordered with flowers, with every old shed and stable and bin torn away and forgotten. That will be when we have ceased to be barbarous. But how shall it all be accomplished?